

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS" CHAPTER VIII CHRISTMAS TIDE

Early the next morning Mary Carmichael was kneeling outside of one of the confessionals in the church where the nurses of St. Columba's attended for daily Mass. Mary had her regular confessor to whom she had gone for the last two years, but he was not attached to this church. She was particularly sorry that she could not go to him this morning, but had she done so she would have been late for breakfast at the Home, and so it was not to be thought of. She felt a little nervous in spite of her almost unrealistic happiness—as she knelt there waiting for the priest.

It was a few minutes after seven o'clock, and Mass was being celebrated at the High Altar, and also at two of the side altars. The church was fairly full, and there was a constant stream of worshippers coming and going, and Mary watched them idly. She was trying to concentrate her mind on her prayers, trying to prepare for her Confession, but found it almost impossible to do so. She had hardly closed her eyes during the night but had found herself going over and over again the happy hour in St. Paul's Surgery—feeling once more his arms around her, his kisses on her lips. It had really come to her at last—this great, this unbelievable happiness at which she had only allowed herself to glance now and then. Sleep kept far off all night, and she only fell into an uneasy doze as it drew towards morning; then soon after six o'clock she rose and dressed herself and took her way to the church for Confession. She had been to the Sacrament of Penance as usual on the previous Saturday and this was only Tuesday, but to Mary, the fact that she had allowed a man to hold her in his arms and to kiss her—even though that man was her future husband—made it necessary for her to get Absolution before she could receive Holy Communion. And she would not have missed receiving on this morning for a great deal—this the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the end—and oh, what a fitting end, to her Novena.

"Oh, Mother Immaculate," she whispered, with shining eyes and trembling lips, "I thank thee, oh, I thank thee." The priest was coming, with noiseless sandalled feet, and a soft swish of his flowing habit, and the next minute Mary was at his feet. "And this man, my daughter—has he a real respect for you—real regard? You are sure his intentions are those of an honorable man?" "Oh, Father," and she smiled to herself as she knelt there in the dark interior, "if you only knew him. He is good—so really good—and the soul of honour and truth—oh, it is I—I—and her voice faltered. "Oh, Father it is I that am not worthy of him—Oh! not worthy at all."

Another few minutes, and with the last words of the priest's blessing still ringing in her ears—Mary was kneeling before Our Lady's Altar, pouring out her soul in gratitude. Afterwards, during her thanksgiving, she felt the tears rush to her eyes for very joy—joy that seemed too great to be borne. "Now I understand why joy sometimes kills," she said to herself, as she fought hard for composure ere she left the church and returned to St. Columba's. There all was as usual—the breakfast-table was just the same. The nurses were just the same and the Matron poured the same watery lotion into their cups under the delusion that she was giving them tea. But to Mary everything seemed different, and she felt more than ever inclined to pinch herself and see if she were really awake or not. She did not know or care what she was eating, but just went mechanically through the routine of the table—even the "bition" which she detested from her very heart—passed unnoticed by her this morning. She sat through the short breakfast, almost in silence, with shining eyes, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she forced herself to answer the few remarks addressed to her. "This is awful," she thought, with a shamefaced, tender little smile at her own weakness. "How will I ever get through my work if I let my thoughts wander like this?"

But no sooner was she on duty than she found that the daily routine, the accustomed discipline and above all her love for her work—enabled her to get through her morning's cases without too much day-dreaming. The next evening she asked leave after supper, which was at the early hour of 8 p. m. at St. Columba's, and took the tram across to Rathmines to the Blakes' house. Mary Blake had only to look at her to know what had happened. "Come up to my room and take off your cloak," she said, and as they were mounting the stairs she slipped her arm around the other's waist, "Mary," she whispered softly, "it's all right, isn't it? He has spoken to you?"

And Mary Carmichael, "betwixt smiles and tears," told her all. "But don't say anything to anyone else yet," she added, "for nothing is made public—it is just between Theo and myself—and you are the only one to whom I have said anything so far."

"Oh, Mary," said her friend, "isn't our Lady good to you! Dr. Delaney! Why you should be a proud woman this night!"

"And do you think I'm not!" cried the other, "but oh, Mary, I am half afraid—for I know—oh, I know—that I am not worthy of him—not fit to be his wife."

But the other gave her a playful little shake. "Now don't be silly, Mary," she said, and if the shake was in joke, the tone of voice was serious, "don't be silly! A good woman is worthy of a good man any day—indeed more than worthy—and Theodore Delaney knows well that you are fit to be the wife of the best man living."

"Oh! Mary, don't," cried her friend, and she shivered as with cold, "don't talk that way! You don't know me—I'm not really good at all—not naturally good, I mean—and it is a hard struggle for me sometimes to lead the life of a good Catholic. And I am afraid—oh, Mary, sometimes I'm afraid—afraid—that if some great trouble or sorrow was to come upon me I should not be able to bear it in the right spirit!"

Mary Blake looked at her friend with puzzled, troubled eyes for a moment—this was a mood she could not fathom. "Mary, dear," she said then, "don't be foolish! Why should you—now especially when a great joy has come into your life—why should you be thinking of evil fortune? But even if God did send you sorrow—and sure we must all go through our share of it in life. He would surely send you strength to bear it also."

Mary Carmichael put her arms around her friend, and laid her head on her shoulder. "Oh, Mary," she said, brokenly, "I hope He will—I hope He will. The other, kissed her in some bewilderment. "Mary dearest," she said, "you are upset and not yourself. And no wonder after the great event of last Monday! Come downstairs now, or the others will be thinking how selfish I am to keep you so long to myself! And don't be thinking of trouble or misfortune at all. Just look at the bright side of things—and Mary, dear, if ever a woman had cause to be happy, you are that woman tonight."

And so they went downstairs to join in the gay talk and chatter in the homely dining-room—not so very gay tonight, however, for Nora—happy, irresponsible Nora—was at a dance, and Shamus was absent too. "He's at a Sinn Fein meeting," said Mary Blake, pausing for a moment before entering the room, "and do you know, Mary, I wish he wasn't such an extremist, and so mixed up with these political matters."

"Oh! nonsense!" said the other Mary, smiling. "What harm will it do him? Besides he is so obsessed by the Irish question that it would be utterly useless to try and change him." "It isn't exactly that we want to change him," said his sister with a loving smile. "Dear old Shamus! What harm is it for the world—but but I am afraid sometimes that he will get into trouble with the authorities—do something desperate."

Late that same night Mary Blake stood talking for a few moments in her cousin's room. "How pretty and happy—almost too happy—Mary Carmichael looked tonight," said Clare, "one would think she had come in for a big fortune, or some wonderful piece of luck!"

Mary Blake smiled. "Perhaps she has," she said, but she did not feel at liberty to say anything more. Clare Castlemaine sighed. "Some people are born lucky," she said, "and perhaps she is one of them. But do you know, Mary, that although she is so good and religious and all that, still I always have a queer notion that there is another side altogether to her character, and I believe that if she ever got some big trouble or sorrow—well! I don't believe somehow that her religion would help her at all—indeed I think she would—well, I won't say so to the bad—but I mean something very like it!"

"Clare," gasped Mary in horror. "Well, Mary, I can't help thinking so. I may be wrong, but one thing I do know, and that is that if ever Mary Carmichael had a big trouble and came out of it all right—I mean remained as good a Catholic after it as she is now, and so on—the well, she would do more towards my conversion than all the preaching of hundreds of priests could ever do!"

Mary Blake stood for a moment, too surprised to speak, and then she said good-night rather soberly, and left the room, for she was remembering the words of Mary Carmichael, earlier in the evening. "Oh! Mary, I am afraid—sometimes I'm afraid—that if some great trouble or sorrow were to come upon me I would not be able to bear it in the right spirit?" She went rather slowly down to the dining-room, where she found Tom alone, staring with unseeing eyes at some building plans spread on the table before him. He looked up as his sister entered, and the pain in his honest grey eyes smote her to the heart.

She came to him and slipped her hand through his arm, and laid her sleek, brown head on his shoulder. "Dear old boy," she said softly, "for there were no secrets between these two. "Mary," he said quietly, "tell me!—has Delaney spoken to her?" And Mary, recognizing his right to put the question, answered, just as quietly, "yes, Tom."

And she? Ah! I needn't ask," he said bitterly. Mary said nothing, but her touch was a caress. There was silence for a short time between them, and then Tom stooped and kissed the gentle face so near his own. "Never mind, sister mine!" he said, "don't worry over me—I'm able to bear it! And I could bear it gladly," he added, "if I was only sure that this thing was for her happiness."

"But, Tom," said his sister, "surely you can trust Dr. Delaney to make her happy?" Tom Blake did not reply for a moment, but stood gazing into the fire. Then rousing himself, he gave his shoulders a slight shrug. "Well!—perhaps so!" he said curtly, and returned to his drawings.

The following weeks passed more less like a dream to Mary Carmichael. She and Dr. Delaney met constantly, and went everywhere together—dances, theatres, and pictures, and also to those various scientific and social lectures, in which both were interested. The nurses at St. Columba's chaffed Mary a good deal, but she took none of them into her confidence, except Nurse Seely and Nurse Ray. Nurse Seely, of course, had partly guessed how matters were for some time past, and Dr. Head—most talkative of men—had told her much more. As for Daisy Ray, her own love affair made her a sympathetic friend, and she and Mary had many a talk together. "What are you giving Dr. Delaney for his Xmas gift, Mac?" inquired Miss Ray one evening, as the two of them were returning homeward along O'Connell Street. It was within ten days of the great festival now, and the shop windows were glittering with their usual display of Yuletide articles. "That's just what I am trying to determine, Daisy," said Mary, with a little sigh of perplexity; "it is so hard to think of a present for a man! Now for a woman's gift one has almost a limitless choice, but for men!—What are you giving to Brendan?"

But Daisy was chatting away at her side, like the little magpie she was. "I'll tell you two things not to give him anyway, Mac," she was saying. "Don't give him any kind of a knife or scarf pin, and—oh! yes—don't give him a prayer book! You are both such pious creatures you know, that you might be fancying a present of that sort!"

Mary smiled. "Well, I was thinking of a scarf pin," she admitted. "Oh, don't," cried her friend, in tones of exaggerated horror, "it's most awfully unlucky to give such a thing to anyone you are really fond of."

"Well, what about sleeve-links?" asked Mary. "I saw some very pretty ones—the other day—gold shamrocks—rather dainty I thought."

"The very thing!" exclaimed her friend, "links you know bind things together, and the shamrock is for luck—Oh! they will be just right, Mary."

And so Mary purchased her sleeve-links with a shy joy, and hid them away in her "bottom drawer" until a few days before Xmas. Then one evening when she and Dr. Delaney were going to the pictures together, she took them out, and slipped them into an envelope. Inside she wrote "—Just to wish you a very happy Xmas and a lucky New Year—Mary."

And sealing it up she put it in her coat pocket. She and Dr. Delaney walked home together for the pictures, and as usual stopped for a last few moments' conversation under the street lamp in the old Square. Across the wide street from St. Columba's Home, the light from the lamp flickered on its wide front, and great stone steps, flickering too on the shining, wet pavement under their feet, for it had been raining. How often they had stood there of a night! "Their lamp," they called it. The policeman, whose beat was on that side of the Square, knew them well, and often threw them a sympathetic smile, as he saluted in passing. Mary felt a little shy and nervous as her hand sought her coat pocket. "I have a little thing for you—for Xmas," she said, with a shaky laugh—"something I got in the Penny Bazaar for you. You are not to open it till you get home!"

His fingers closed on hers as he took the little gift and seemed reluctant to let them go. Then he also dived into a pocket and brought forth a package. "TO BE CONTINUED"

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"Oh, don't be foolish," he replied. "Look here," pointing his pen at her to emphasize his words, "when you find that you have hurt someone who, you are sure, never caused another pain, then it is time enough to feel bad; as it is, forget it."

One day the elevator boy asked her, "How do you like your boss?" "I like him," she replied. The boy looked at her for a second. "He's a bad man when he gets started," he said.

On one evening after the winter sun streamed through the office windows, glistening the icicles that hung outside, filling the room with warmth and light, and cheering the heart of the girl. She turned her eyes toward the desk opposite her. There he sat, his head bent over his papers. The gloom in his face would make one think that there was no sunlight nor anything else in all the world to gladden poor mortals.

"I suppose," she sighed, "he was crossed in love," and resolutely put her mind on her work. Scarcely had she begun when she was interrupted. The door opened, admitting a woman, who closed it carefully behind her. Her face and manner showed agitation. She approached the man. The hand she laid on the desk trembled. In a voice that quivered she said, "Mother wants to see you—she's dying."

"She does, does she? Well, she can wait." He flung the words at her fiercely. "I don't see how you could act so towards your own mother. After all she has done for you; when you know how she loves you." Her voice was loud with anger now. "I don't see how anyone could be as mean and contemptible as you are." "Love," there was infinite scorn in his voice. "It must be a wonderful love indeed that will prompt a person to beat the object of his affection. Yes! I owe a debt to my mother. I owe her a debt of vengeance. She gave me life, but did I ask for it? She married a man who was cursed with an ungovernable temper and I inherited it. Was I to blame for that? Every time I made a display of that temper she whipped me for it. She beat me into submission, but the anger raged in me just the same. It poisoned my mind and heart and soul against her and every other living creature. From back as far as I can remember, ever since I was a mite of a child, I vowed that when I was big enough, I would give her a blow for everyone she gave me. I haven't done it though. I may be mean; and contemptible, but there is one thing I cannot do and that is strike anyone weaker than myself."

But I've made her suffer. For twelve years I've lived within a mile of her and have never gone to her nor allowed her to come to me. I've passed her by as if she were a stranger and I have seen her wince. I enjoyed it. She must have enjoyed seeing me wince when she stood over me with a stick. I've made her life miserable, I'll make her die miserably. This is my last chance to get even and," bringing his fist down with a force that sent the pens and pencils scattering to the floor, "by—h—I'll take it."

If his face was ugly before, and his eyes were wild like those of a man gone mad. His sister fled, slamming the door after her. The man turned to the girl in the corner. "I suppose," he said "after witnessing that scene you too think that I am the worst brute on earth."

"No," she answered quietly, "I think only that where most men forget or laugh at the abuse they suffer in childhood, you have a clearness of vision that allows you to see that the wrong was all the greater because inflicted on one who was small and helpless. If more men held your views public opinion would cease to tolerate the inhuman treatment of children."

Never before had he been told there was anything admirable in him. For just about one minute he was happy. The girl left her seat, walked over to him, and laid her hand ever so tenderly on his arm. At the touch of it something in his heart broke. And although that hand was red and chapped and two of the fingers were stained with ink spots he gazed on it as if it were an object of loveliness.

He could not go back and tell that girl that he had failed. He rushed up the steps cursing when he slipped, and up the stairs to his mother's room. It was in this room he was born.

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His sister started in surprise and fear at the sight of him. He went to his mother's bed and stood looking down on her. She did not appear to be a tyrant. White hair, white face, and white lips, her wasted fingers nervously puckering the sheet. When she opened her eyes they were pitiful.

This victim of her own brutality dying in the firm conviction that she was a martyr did not move him to pity. The old resentment, the old desire for revenge, flamed him into an anger that put fire in his eyes and parched his lips. Yet he placed those lips on the cold, bloodless ones, and he made them form the words: "I'm sorry mother, won't you forgive me?" "That was all I was waiting for," she murmured and then she died.

Her daughter, with a hysterical scream, fell across the bed, sobbing convulsively. The man went to the window where the last rays of the sun poured in. It gladdened his heart. The laughter of the children outside found an echo in that heart. The sinister grip that had held it so long was loosened. Because he had sacrificed he had done the thing he swore he could not and would not do—he had forgiven.

PURIFYING THE FILMS

The day of the legitimate stage seems to be passing. No longer do crowded houses watch breathlessly the realistic portrayal of Shylock or of Mark Antony. Oliver Goldsmith is forgotten: "Everyman" comes to town once in ten years, Miracle Plays are at a premium, and one hears little about them. The moving pictures have superseded Mansfield and Sothern, and the busy housewife finds this popular form of relaxation the simplest way out of the monotony of the everyday routine. Our boys and girls discourse fervently of their favorite screen stars; long lines of children, many of them scarcely more than babes in arms, wait patiently outside the theatres in the afternoons and often in the evening. People are going to the movies, there is no doubt about it. Scarcely a vacant seat is to be seen in any of the playhouses. Young and old, innocent and sophisticated are going. That is obvious. The popular pastime is on the increase in prestige. More and more theatres rise here and there over the city. There are always sufficient patrons to make them highly successful from a financial standpoint. Assured of patronage, it is no longer a question with the owners of such houses as to how they shall attract an audience. The audience is assured. The next thing to be considered is the kind of amusement which shall be offered. A very kind of amusement is often of a very dubious nature. A passing glance at a few of the brilliant posters which line various public places of the city will serve to strengthen this impression. The preponderance of the divorce tale, the instability of the home which lacks the element of religion, the attractive villain, so attractive that vice itself seems rather a pleasant sort of thing to the uneducated, are but a few of the elements of the moving picture which stand in sore need of purification. At the present time a committee in conference representing fifty of the largest philanthropic, welfare, educational and labor organizations of the country have taken the matter in hand, and are striving to work out a platform for the purifying of the moving picture. As the first step of their platform they advocate the total abstinence from any film which is known to be objectionable. The next thing to be considered is: how many people will deny themselves and abide by the counsel given to them? It is a simple thing to complain of abuses, not quite so easy to conform to the advice and counsels offered. Will this committee have the whole-souled co-operation of all citizens in this worthy enterprise? That remains to be seen. A college professor, in conversation with a youth who confessed to a decided aversion to unwholesome films, asked him a pertinent question: Would you attend that theatre again where you have habitually witnessed plays of an immoral nature? The youth thought that he might. What is the use of complaining of abuses if one is willing to sit by and leave the effort to his neighbor? Where is the practical utility of noble aspirations if a man is not going to exert himself to live up to them? If a handful of people willingly subscribe to a certain platform, and all the rest, like the youth

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